**Engagement Standards in Research for Development within the Africa RISING Program**

Africa RISING is a research for development program that aims at providing pathways out of poverty for smallholder farmer households through sustainably intensified farming systems that improve food, nutrition, income security, particularly for women and children, and conserve or enhance the natural resource base. Participatory research is a key foundation for success. Participatory research emphasizes the importance of engaging relevant stakeholders in all steps of the research process. Participatory research approaches therefore demand a level of engagement and commitment from farmers that researchers need to respect. Equally, researchers need to engage with each other for mutual learning, integration of research activities and to ensure that farmers are not overburdened by research activities. In order to avoid redundancies and add value, the program will leverage other opportunities with different stakeholders and complimentary projects.

This document provides some guidelines to researchers that will help to avoid negative relationships between them, farmers and other stakeholders and foster ethical conduct within the Africa RISING community.

**1. Farmers’ Engagement in Research Processes**

**Diagnostic studies**

Gaining an understanding of the farming and wider livelihood systems targeted by research projects is an essential step in targeting research activities that will lead to impact and measurable development outcomes. As the first point of engagement between projects and communities, proper conduct of such studies can help to establish lasting trust and partnerships between all actors in the research process. The guidelines should be followed:

* Diagnostic studies are generally highly extractive in nature with farmers gaining little direct benefit from them. They will however raise farmers’ expectations of future exchanges that operate on a two-way basis. It is not acceptable to conduct diagnostic studies without clear follow-up activities. It is imperative that researchers communicate realistic expectations and avoid leading community members to have unrealistic expectations. This includes pointing out the limited period of the engagement. At the start of the research process, participants should be given an opportunity to clarify their expectations.
* Having said this, well-conducted diagnostic studies generally stimulate dialog with participating farmers. “Sorry we don’t have time, the next question is….” is not an acceptable response to queries from farmers. Build time into interview schedules to allow you to respond fully to any questions / discussions that farmers might initiate.
* Farmers often give up a considerable portion of their busy days to participate in diagnostic activities. Respect this by conducting interview schedules on time and organizing things, as far as possible so interviewees are not waiting around.
* When planning field activities of any type, but particularly for diagnostic interviews, familiarize yourself with the farming calendar. There is no point of conducting socio-economic data during peak periods in the farming year (planting, weeding, harvesting etc.). Having a proper understanding of the gendered division of work and responsibilities would provide a clear understanding of the periods when women and men are available to participate actively in diagnostic activities.
* You may be participating in a relatively well-funded initiative. The issue of offering participants incentives to join activities requires sensitive handling, particularly in relation to the options that are open to other agencies operating in the same area that may not be able to “compete”. Discuss incentives with other actors and reach a consensus on appropriate levels of incentives that will not distort the local market! TO BE HARMONIZED WITHIN AFRICA RISING

**Identifying research problems**

It is imperative that the farming community is actively engaged in selection and prioritization of research areas. This fosters inclusiveness and integration of community perspectives in research thereby implementing research that is more responsive to farmers’ needs. During this process:

* Researchers and community members need to come to a mutual agreement when establishing research areas, approaches and identifying viable interventions. Researchers and community members determine what works and what does not work, or what is within the project limits and donor interest.
* Be realistic about what the research can accomplish to build trust among researchers and community members. However, one has to weigh the implications of disclosing negative realities on continuous engagement of community members.
* Gender roles influence the perceptions of men and women on research problems. Therefore gender has to be considered as a significant component in identifying research problems. Compare the similarities and differences between men and women’s experiences and perspectives and value them equally. This will generate a more comprehensive picture of the problem, and facilitate design of tools, which will better address gender differences.
* Power relations between men and women influence their perspectives about their problems and proposed solutions. It is imperative that researchers take into account the roles of men and women and how these may impact on the outcomes of the research.
* Researchers need to listen to the voices of community members and share power in making research decisions. There is need to be sensitive to gender and cultural issues within a community.

**Selection of research beneficiaries or participants**

Researchers need to be flexible in determining who represents the community so as not to miss out on what is important for the community. Criteria for selection could include among others: willingness to host the experiment, willingness to share and teach other farmers, openness to visitors, ability to follow the protocols, visibility and accessibility of plots, reliability of experiment management.

* Involve community leaders in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation to further create a sense of ownership and acceptability of the research.
* It is important that researchers understand that participation is voluntary. Levels of participation may differ according to interest, resource availability and cultural context. Some people will be highly motivated to participate while others may not.
* Pay special attention to the category of people who tend to be discriminated in research for development programs and lay strategies to include them. These could include women, youths and the landless among others.
* Be aware of the fact that the interests of researchers and community members influence their perceptions on who to work with and how, where and when.

**Conducting research**

In order to ensure continuity from diagnostics to results and later on adoption, farmers who were engaged in the earlier stages of the research process should be included in the research implementation. This adds to building ownership and trust between researchers and farmers.

* Prior to beginning a study researchers must disclose to all participants the overall objectives of the project and its sponsor. Transparency allows farmers to make informed decisions whether to engage in the project or not. Researchers have to be clear about the voluntary nature of participation and seek consent in an open manner. Farmers may reject or withdraw their consent at any time in the course of the research.
* Constraints and risks associated with technologies should be made known in advance and mitigating measures should be put in place.
* When researchers and farmers agree to work together, the group has to decide on the modalities of working together. This includes setting goals and objectives, selecting methodology, agreeing on methods of communication, sharing roles and responsibilities and agreeing on the processes of data collection, monitoring and evaluation.
* Select gender sensitive tools, methodologies and approaches, which will encourage and enhance active participation of men, women and youth and conserve integrity.
* Generate data that is meaningful to the community to create a sense of ownership and sustain participation. It’s important that the research seeks information that will be useful to the community and also influence policy.
* Assess the impact of the proposed solutions on men and women in terms of their capacity to access resources, workload, social status, and power relations.
* Some of the meeting venues and time may not be convenient for men, women and youth to engage actively. Therefore, researchers should have a clear understanding of the effect of a venue and time on participation of men, women and youth to avoid exclusion.
* Conflict of interest between researchers and community members, or amongst researchers or among different groups within a community will be encountered at different stages of the research process. Community members and researchers need to come to an agreement on different aspects of the research at the onset to minimize conflicts.
* Regular feedback sessions should be scheduled to inform farmers about experiments and use of their data.

**Completing engagement with farmers**

Researchers must ensure a smooth conclusion of the engagement by involving the key stakeholders, who were involved in previous stages of the research. Conclusion may happen gradually or suddenly depending on various factors (local, external).

* Should project activities be phased out, farmers should be informed in due time about the reasons and the completion process should be agreed upon.
* Researchers need to reflect upon potential negative effects associated with the end of the engagement and consider compensation if necessary (preferably in kind).

**2. Researchers’ Engagement with Peers**

Sustainable intensification needs coherence and integration of research results. Therefore, researchers need to work with each other to leverage opportunities and resources. The following guidelines are suggested:

* Avoid redundant surveys through coordination with other researchers and making use of each other’s data. This will reduce farmers’ research fatigue and support our objective of systems research.
* All research results have to be validated by stakeholders and farmers.
* Training in participatory methodology and its application is a requirement for all researchers.

**3. Researchers’ Engagement with other Stakeholders**

Apart from engagement with farmers and peers, researchers build partnerships with extension agents, other development agencies and complementary projects, private sector, policy makers, national agricultural extension and national research institutes.

Intellectual property

Confidentiality

Data sharing management

Branding guidelines

Subcontractors should follow the engagement standards with farmers and peers. When working with other stakeholders, researchers should ensure that stakeholders are aware of

Receive training

Partnerships are monitored and reported back, is terminated use participatory when working with farmers.

Sustainability: disengagement with other stakeholders, risk associated with working with us, partners rely on too much on AR financial standards (copy disengagement paragraph with farmers)

**4. Data Handling**

Ownership and custodianship of data collected by projects of this type is a sensitive issue. TO BE REVISED BASED ON THE NEW DATA MANAGEMENT POLICY.

* The general principle underlying this program’s activities is that all data are under the shared ownership of all program partners.
* Each research team will appoint one person responsible for uploading and monitoring data on PMMT.
* Custodianship will be determined by the capacity of the responsible organization to hold and distribute data securely.
* To ensure custodianship all meta and research data have to be uploaded on CKAN following the Africa RISING data management policy.
* Publication rights are shared amongst all partners but original collection teams should be acknowledged in all cases. Authorship is granted to all partners who participate in the design, analysis and interpretation of studies that make use of project data but is not required for data collectors.
* Researchers who intend to publish research results should invite all colleagues who participated in at least one stage of the research process (design, implementation, analysis) to contribute to the publication.
* Researchers should respect that the ultimate owners of the data collected are the farmers themselves. Engage community members in reporting back the research findings to increase ownership of research findings.
* Consideration of gender perspectives in analysis, interpretation and dissemination of data will enhance design of appropriate interventions.
* Maintain anonymity and confidentiality of farmers participating in the research. Researchers need to be creative in handling identifying information and provide utmost confidentiality of farmer’s data.
* Ethical clearance must be obtained from relevant authorities for any data that involves human subject.
* Taking and publishing pictures or data that allow tracing back to individuals should be done with their consent and in accordance with the donor, institution and Africa RISING data management policies.

**Conclusions**

Participatory research requires active involvement of farmers and other stakeholders in the different stages of the research processes. The required level of engagement may not be achieved without respect of stakeholders as equal partners and recognition of their input. Participatory research requires proper understanding of the cultural, social, economic and political factors and how they influence participation. Gender and age differences in access to resources, division of labour and institutional factors need to be considered throughout the process.

These guidelines will be reviewed and adjusted in line with evolving CGIAR guidelines around engagement, ethics, and data curation.

**Bibliography**

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